

Sunday Independent

ARCHITECT'S CLINIC

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Do we need a structural engineer on our refurb?

Q MY husband and I are waiting on planning permission to renovate a house. Our budget is very tight, but we're happy to forgo items such as wardrobes/stove and get very basic items such as a kitchen to ensure the house can be completed. Our most pressing issue is whether to employ a structural engineer. This will add an extra €4k to the budget which we don't have. We trust our builder immensely and he has been personally recommended. Are we OK not to employ a structural engineer, or is it a necessity?

A FIRSTLY, do not underestimate the value of professional services for your project. You are about to spend a significant sum of money to make alterations to what is likely your principal investment – your home. The right advice will add value to your investment while protecting your interests during the process. Undertaking a build is likely to be something you will only do once in a lifetime and you need to be certain of achieving the quality you expect while fully complying with building legislation.

First and foremost, you should engage a registered architect to make the best creative use of both existing and new spaces therefore delivering the best return on your investment. They can also create a bespoke design which will make the most of the site, any views and light – ultimately creating a unique solution to meet your needs and budget. During the detailed design (post-planning) and build itself, they will advise on general building regulation compliance, insulation levels, finishes, fit-out and building contracts – often finding the most economical solutions to make your budget go further. However, you will certainly also need a structural engineer – they both provide different services and bring a different value to the project. The structural engineer will design and oversee any beams required to make openings into the existing house and will design foundations and structure in general.



An architect will help make best use of space

By overseeing the works at critical stages, they will both ensure that you only pay for work done correctly and, critically, will be able to co-certify the works on completion. This is likely to be a fundamental requirement if financing is sought and will invariably be requested by any prospective purchaser in the future. This cannot be done by your builder as they are not qualified or insured to do so.

If your extension is larger than 40sqm, you will also need to comply with the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations. This brings additional obligations to demonstrate compliance and, while a recent partial 'opt out' is available, you will invariably need an architect and an engineer to demonstrate compliance and provide end certification in conjunction with the builder.

Remember, while this is an additional cost on a tight budget, it would be inadvisable to make such a significant investment without getting the fundamentals right and employing a registered architect. Your financial lender may require this in any case for drawing down finance. Like everything these days, I would obtain a number of quotations from registered architects. You'll find a registered architect on the **RIAI** website, riai.ie.

The RIAI is the registration body for architects in Ireland. Alan Burns is a registered architect, MRIAI. His practice is Bright Design Architects, bda.ie

Do you have a design dilemma we can help you with? Email designclinic@independent.ie. Advice is for guidance only and readers are advised to seek professional assistance for any proposed project.